Keeping Woman safe through Social Networking

[](javascript:pop_me_up2('http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2011/03/01/Road.html','Road_html','width=495,height=630,scrollbars=yes,toolbars=no,resizable=yes'))EVERY female [business traveler](http://travel.nytimes.com/travel/guides/business/overview.html?inline=nyt-classifier) I know concedes that she has experienced at least some kind of sexual harassment on the road. Usually it’s verbal, though sometimes it’s physical.

But rarely is it reported — not to the authorities and not at the office, where a woman who talks about harassment on a business trip may worry about being marked as a problem traveler.

Now, though, something new and aggressive is being done to publicly address street harassment of women. It’s a movement driven by young women in the United States and abroad who are using social networking and crowd sourcing to shine a light on the issue and organize support for doing something about it.

Street harassment of women has been around “probably since the advent of streets,” said Emily May, 29, the co-founder of [Ihollaback.org](http://ihollaback.org/), a Web site that encourages women to share stories and provide data about harassment so they can map locations where it occurred.

The subject came up again last month, when the CBS News correspondent [Lara Logan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/lara_logan/index.html?inline=nyt-per)was sexually attacked by a mob in Tahrir Square in Cairo. In Egypt, according to a 2008 study by the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, 98 percent of foreign female visitors, and 83 percent of Egyptian women, said they had experienced some form of sexual harassment on the streets, mostly verbal but sometimes worse.

“Ihollaback is taking awareness to a new level in helping to create a platform where people can talk about this worldwide,” said Holly Kearl, 28, the author of “Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women,” a book published last year by Praeger. Ms. Kearl also operates a Web site, [Stopstreetharassment.com](http://stopstreetharassment.com/), “where people can share their stories in a way they don’t feel comfortable sharing them in person,” she said.

Ms. Kearl said she had experienced what she wrote about. “Mostly it’s whistling and catcalls and gross sexual comments,” she said. “But I’ve also been followed and a man grabbed my crotch once on the street.” As Ms. Kearl wrote her book, her mother shared her own stories of street harassment. So did her grandmother.

Meanwhile, Ihollaback.org started in New York in 2005 when Ms. May and six friends decided that technology and networking could be applied to the ages-old problem. There are now 12 sister Ihollaback sites in 12 international cities, and 14 more starting soon. “We’re using social networking, blogging, aps and maps to help people share stories and to build a case,” she said. “Street harassment of women has been silenced for too long, and we’re breaking that silence.”

To me, the most impressive thing about the fight-back phenomenon is the youthful determination to organize and take concerted action about a problem that female travelers have long faced on the road, often alone and without recourse. If they do report an incident, they often encounter the “blame the victim” reaction, Ms. Kearl noted.

“A lot of women are traveling the planet, and whether it’s a city like New York or Chicago or Houston or Cairo, their guard is up,” said Carol Margolis, a business consultant and founder of [Smartwomentravelers.com](http://smartwomentravelers.com/).

“I’ve been physically abused on a bus, I’ve been groped on a train, and I’ve jumped out of cabs that were taking me in the wrong direction,” she said. “Has this stopped me from traveling, or kept me away from big cities? Absolutely not. But it has made me more observant, more prepared and more street-smart.”

Even within the security of a hotel room some women don’t feel safe, Ms. Margolis said.

“A female airline pilot told me that the first thing she does is stick Kleenex in the peephole. It seems that flight attendants and female pilots are almost more neurotic about these things because they simply have been exposed to more.”

That particular peephole concern was underscored in 2009, when a video appeared on the Internet showing an [ESPN](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/espn/index.html?inline=nyt-org) reporter, Erin Andrews, naked in her hotel room. The video was made surreptitiously through her hotel door peephole.

Female business travelers, many of them juggling work and family responsibilities, are famously tough and resilient — but concerns about sexual harassment often add an element of wariness, said Ms. Margolis. She is working with a hotel chain, which she declined to identify, to develop social programs for female business travelers. “I think it restricts some women on the road from leaving their hotels and really enjoying their travels in their off-time.”

# Bibliography

Sharkay, J. (2011, Marzo 1). *New York Times*. Retrieved Marzo 3, 2011, from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/business/01road.html?\_r=1&ref=technology

En mi opinión este artículo pertenece a la categoría de “Personas y máquinas” ya que trata de las importantes ventajas del TI en su uso para evitar exponer a personas a entornos peligrosos. En este caso, las mujeres que han sido víctimas de ataques ya sean verbales o físicos en las calles, utilizan una red social para contar sus experiencias y prevenir a otras mujeres de los peligros de este tipo que abundan en las calles. La tecnología (en este caso una red social) se convierte en una herramienta muy eficaz de seguridad y prevención para evitar lamentables accidentes que, antes de que existiera ésta red social, podían ser muy graves a falta de información acerca del peligro en las calles.